“Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, ‘Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.”

Daniel 6:16

The Island of Lions

By Nolan James Williams

Inspired by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*

Characters:

- Gennady Petrovich: the prisoner

A Christian thrown in jail for counter-revolutionary activity (protesting food shortage). He wants to be treated better by the gulag because he believes the world should be more just. He has a worldview that centers on a clear line between right and wrong. His father would beat him, but his mother instilled a Christian worldview in him, even with Soviet persecution. When he saw that his job was unfair to its workers, he protested. When he was mistreated in prison, he protested. He is sure of his standing and will not capitulate to anyone. He is the rock this show stands on, Ivan learns from him.

- Ivan Mikhailovich: the psychologist

A soviet psychologist, newly assigned to the gulag system. He believes whole-heartedly in the Soviet system and the system of psychology which he has been reared in. Unfortunately, his philosophy is wrong, and he knows this deep down. This show centers around his internal conflict, deciding between what is safe - both physically and for his worldview - and what is right. He is a man who had been conditioned his whole life to believe in an evil system, and he is realizing that everything he stands for is wrong.

- Vladimir Igorovich: the warden

An agent of all things Soviet, he cares not for the people in his keeping. He cares only for supporting the gulag system. He believes that communism's success is inevitable, and its opposition must be rooted out. He does not intend to be evil; he just idolizes the utopian idea of communism and will do anything to see it realized. He wants a better world but does not notice the people that live in it.

Scene 1:

(Lights up. Doctor Ivan Mikhailovich is sitting at his desk reading a study or something. There is a knock on the door)

Ivan: Come in

(The Warden, Vladimir, enters carrying a file)

Ivan: Comrade warden *(stands)*

Vlad: Good evening, Ivan Mikhailovich. We have a case that we want you to examine. *(hands file to Ivan; Ivan sits, opens it, and starts reading)* The subject is convicted to ten years of forced labor for counter-revolutionary activity. However, we suspect that he may be a schizophrenic. We would like to get your professional opinion on the matter.

Ivan: Very well, I should like to get a good look at him; run some tests.

Vlad: We have him right here. *(snaps) (Gennady Petrovich stumbles onstage)* We will need him back very soon for further processing.

Ivan: I will make best use of the time comrade. *(Bows his head slightly)*

(Vladimir nods back and exits) (awkward silence as Ivan keeps reading and Gennady stands)

Ivan: Please, take a seat.

Gennady: Not “take a seat comrade?” Aren’t we a nation built on total equality?

Ivan: No prisoner is a comrade of mine.

Gennady: I look just like any other comrade, don’t I?

Ivan: There is a such thing as position, context.

(Opens file)

Ivan: Gennady Petrovich. Born 12th of September 1934. Sentenced to ten years for counter revolutionary activity. Picked up with 30 others attempting to organize a strike at the steel mill.

Gennady: I regret nothing. Good men are providing good service but can't afford to eat. Shouldn't the worker be provided for?

Ivan: You have had what appears to be a psychotic episode. You went on hunger strike demanding better treatment for the prisoners. When questioned about why you were starving yourself, you are recorded saying, "justice means more to me than life." Thus, you are in my office; a lunatic on his way to either a labor camp or an asylum.

Gennady: I'm just a Soviet citizen who wants to have his voice heard. I can't stand being stepped on by someone who feels bigger and stronger than everyone else. Today, in that steel mill and all over, people are starving.

Ivan: I'm sure that story makes you feel noble and secure, but just look around you. You have been arrested and convicted by the Soviet Union. How could this have happened if you really were standing for the worker?

Gennady: It did. I believe that the people in power exercise that power to keep their position. They put me in this can, but that does not make it right. Might does not make right.

Ivan: But it sure makes things happen. You've been around this prison long enough to realize whether or not the interrogator has reason to beat you, you're still beaten.

Gennady: Beaten or not, man can still understand that he shouldn't be. We know justice, deep at the bottom of the heart. Justice is more important than life itself.

Ivan: *(taken aback)* Saying that got you thrown into the psychiatric ward. You actually believe that?

Gennady: Without justice, nobody can truly live.

Ivan: Nobody can manage without life either. Man is an animal; the animal's only goal is survival. Why would you do anything to jeopardize that?

Gennady: Whether it is today, tomorrow, or 50 years from now, I will cease to survive. But in a world with justice, maybe a new generation of people can *live.*

Vladimir *(offstage)*: Prisoner! Your session is over!

Gennady: Good night, comrade. *(exit)*

Ivan *(to himself)*: No, he's not clinically crazy, but his ideas are crazy. If I were to convince him of the communist standpoint, he could see reason. That is what I shall do; I will cure him.

(blackout)

Scene 2:

(Lights up. Ivan sits at his desk smugly, waiting for Gennady, Gennady enters)

Ivan: Sit down.

Gennady: Yes, comrade.

Ivan: *Winces* Yesterday, I gathered you are anti-Soviet: against both our nation and our ideas. What's led you to such an opinion?

Gennady: When I was a boy, my father would repress me and keep me from living my life. My mother and I lived in fear of his wrath. When he died, I had to learn to make my way in the real world, one dominated by another tyrant.

Ivan: *(chuckling at his notes)* It's just treason after treason from you, isn't it? I really could tell the warden all about your opinions.

Gennady: Today, I am 26 years old. I will not see freedom until I am at least 36. The best years of my life are already lost to me; I have very little to lose from talking to you. But others have lost more for less. Back in the 20s, the church in this country was irradicated. Their leaders were carted off by the hundreds because they couldn't give enough to the government. They were labeled traitors for doing good.

Ivan: They may have been innocent, but their time had come. Their primitive ghost -fearing has no place in a modern country. Just think, comrade Stalin could build railroads from one end of Russia to the other, he could dig new rivers, he commanded the largest nation in the world and held Europe in the palm of his hand. The Christian king can't hold anything in his hand, *(outstretches arms)* nailed up in his tree.

(Ivan grins at Gennady, Gennady looks unamused, Ivan changes tactics)

Ivan: But seriously, those ghost-fearers, when they were sent to gulag, where was their god? Why did he sit by while his loyal believers were processed and slaughtered? Sounds like a bad god to me.

Gennady: What about comrade Stalin? He sat on his throne and tormented the people of his country. He watched idly as women and children starved. When leaders tried to reform his policies, he purged the party. The god of communism is powerful, but he feels insecure on his throne, always tamping down to secure himself. A small, scheming man trying to rule the world.

Ivan: I never said he was a god, I just said he was powerful. He was the source of all justice and all power in this whole nation. His word was the law. Those martyrs could pray all they wanted; a dozen policemen would put them in their rightful place.

Gennady: When a father beats his son, he is in complete control and is still wrong. When comrade Stalin beat his people, he was the same. Whether or not they are in control, both men are wrong. That is why this entire Soviet system is doomed to fail, because men cannot dominate the truth. *(Blackout)*

Scene 3:

(Lights up. Ivan sits at his desk, staring puzzledly into nothingness. Warden Vladimir Enters)

Vlad: Comrade, good afternoon.

Ivan: Good afternoon.

Vlad: How are you getting adjusted to prison psychology?

Ivan: I'm getting along well, lots of fascinating cases to examine.

Vlad: Speaking of which, how is that schizophrenic ironworker?

Ivan: I don't think he's schizophrenic.

Vlad: What is his condition, then?

Ivan: He's completely sane. He has some anti-Soviet ideas, and that investigation is coming along well

Vlad: Good to hear. I expect you will clear him to be sent off to gulag shortly.

Ivan: I actually was thinking that I should keep him a little longer.

Vlad: *(creases brows)* Comrade, listen, it's not a good use of state resources. *(He looks at Ivan, Ivan is confused, he starts explaining)* The goal of this institution is to root out hostile elements of our country. We protect our way of life from people who intend on putting an end to it. This

country is the center of the communist world, we must protect the idea that the labor of every man is worth that of every other man. If we don't, the bourgeoisie will subjugate the workers once more.

Ivan: But look around, comrade, in our country, under this system, the workers aren't free. Their lives aren't any better for living in our ideal state.

Vlad: It's not an ideal state, yet. True communism hasn't been achieved yet because traitors sabotage it. Small-minded people don't want to give up property, they don't want to give up identity, and they don't want to join the collective. Thus, we must force them. But this will not always be the case, the arc of history is on our side. In thirty years, the people of the world will thank us for standing up.

Ivan: But what if it never works?

Vlad: It must. You're a psychologist, behavior is instilled into people based on scientific principles. The future is complete control by the state. Then, all will be solved. And anyone standing in the way of that future must be conditioned to fit into it. That Gennady prisoner, you may examine him as much as you can, but he's going to a labor camp tonight. *(blackout)*

Scene 4:

(Lights up) (The office is empty. Ivan leads Gennady into the room by his handcuffs. Ivan turns and takes out a key, unlocking Gennady's handcuffs. Ivan turns and goes to his desk)

Gennady: An unscheduled appointment? You're really going out of your way to argue with me. My psychoanalysis says you consider me a comrade.

Ivan: I'm the psychologist, not you. Know your place. (beat) Have a seat.

(Gennady crosses to the desk and sits)

Ivan: I'm the psychologist. I'm trained to look at a person and his past and put together a picture of who he is. Then, I can use this knowledge to solve problems, delve into your mind and fix it. Man is a machine, like a steam engine, though obviously far more complex. Steam engines eat coal, they work, they blow off steam, and when they are managed, they run on time. But most importantly: a steam engine is completely scientifically understood and controlled. You are a steam engine, Gennady Petrovich. I can look inside your mind and see all the valves and pipes that make you who you are. Then, I can make you useful to the party.

Gennady: That's all very impressive. But if you knew everything there is to know about a person, you would know how to make people happy. I look around and see that nobody in this country is happy, so you aren't even close. If you can't find the truth of mankind, you can't control it.

Ivan: The Soviet Union has done plenty of controlling. Finding truth is not necessary because there is no objective truth, only what is practical, only what works

Gennady: No, just as much as I am sure there is justice, I am sure there is truth.

Ivan: Then what is truth? *(smirking)*

Gennady: I know Him very well. *(Ivan glares)* The truth sits above every tyrant; the truth sits at the right hand of the Father.

(Ivan stands and grabs Gennady by his shirt collar)

Ivan: You backward ghost-fearing sludge, don't you know that idle talk like this is why Communism won't work? Don't you know that this sabotage of ideas has resulted in warfare, destruction, and starvation?

Gennady: Everything wrong with this state is at its center. Its foundation is rot, and it will crumble.

(Ivan pushes Gennady backwards and he falls on his butt) (Ivan opens his desk and pulls out a revolver) (Gennady scrambles up and runs away) (Ivan walks around his desk and follows Gennady, adjusting the revolver's chambers)

Ivan: NO, NO, NO! I will not have this happen any longer! This rot is in the way of the future and must be stamped out.

(Gennady is wildly looking around for an exit)

Ivan: There's no way out rat. I've got nine grams of lead here for you.

(Ivan catches up to Gennady, Gennady turns and Ivan punches him in the face, knocking him to the ground) (Gennady lays on his back with his elbows under him, Ivan stands over him brandishing the gun)

Ivan: History does not wait for those who can't leave the past. The past must be stamped out or... or the future will never come.

(Ivan leans as if ready to shoot Gennady but he freezes and starts shaking)

Gennady: *(Noticing Ivan's hesitation)* It's just nine grams of lead, isn't it?

(Ivan drops the gun and sinks to his knees) (Gennady stands, walks over to Ivan and puts out his hand to help him up)

Gennady: *(smirking)* I'll just have to put up with not getting enough to eat, won't I?

(Ivan looks at Gennady but does not take his hand)

(Warden Vladimir enters and sees Gennady standing over Ivan)

Vlad: Feeling daring I see. Scuffling with the faculty?

(Vlad grabs Gennady's arms, pinning him in handcuffs again) (Ivan rises)

Vlad: Doctor, I know you thought the prisoner was an interesting case, but you have taken this too far. We are now disrupting the system of the gulag. We take dissidents in, and we make them useful. Now things are getting ridiculous. I'm taking the prisoner away. *(Vlad starts to take Gennady away)*

Ivan: Wait!

(Vlad and Gennady turn back to Ivan, Vlad watches Ivan) (Ivan walks up to Gennady and shakes his hand)

Ivan: You... you have a friend in the psychology department of Lubyanka prison, Comrade.

(Vlad glares at Ivan. Vlad and Gennady exit, leaving Ivan alone in the office.)

(Ivan looks after them before turning and returning to his desk, he sits and pushes away his study, he bows his head to pray) (Blackout)